

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Duncan Hunter, Chairman

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OPENING REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER

*Full Committee Mark up of H.R. 1588
FY04 National Defense Authorization Act*

The committee meets to mark up the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal year 2004 at an extraordinary period in our nation's history.

From Afghanistan to Iraq to the Korean peninsula, American military might stands forth as the most pronounced and effective instrument of U.S. national security policy. Some will say that this is a new reality that only emerged in the horrible aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. But the prevailing effect of our policy of "peace through strength" over the decades has served as the constant thread that facilitated the end of the Cold War and the advancement of democracy, peace and freedom throughout the world.

While other nations – both allied or not – will always challenge the intent and wisdom behind American policy, there remains near universal respect for the professionalism and efficacy of U.S. military forces.

Over the years, we have asked a lot of our men and women in uniform, and they have always delivered with competence, bravery and dedication. So, as we turn our attention to the multiple policy decisions we will debate and decide today, I believe it is important that we keep firmly in mind that we are here to protect and enhance this remarkable military capability our nation has produced. The security challenges of tomorrow cannot be accurately determined, however, it remains clear that American military power will continue to serve as the invariable element in our security policy.

Thus, the bill the committee ultimately produces today must reflect our collective attempt to adhere to these principles by ensuring that this critical instrument of national power remains second-to-none and ready for whatever challenges the future will bring.

For these reasons, we are undertaking in this legislation multiple important initiatives. First, we will be considering and advancing a series of reforms to bring greater management and operational agility to the Department of Defense. By providing the Department more flexibility in the management of civilian personnel, environmental compliance and acquisition policy, we are ensuring that the bureaucratic processes can keep up with fast changing pace of innovation on the battlefield.

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Second, we are striking a more careful balance between the need to sustain today's critical combat capabilities that performed so magnificently a few short weeks ago in Iraq, while continuing to invest in tomorrow's innovative technologies that will ensure our forces always have the requisite battlefield edge.

Third, we are continuing to strongly support and properly fund those accounts critical to taking care of our troops and their wonderful families that form the backbone of our military force.

Finally, we are endorsing a number of requested initiatives by the Administration as well as recommending a few of our own to ensure we aggressively pursue critical new dimensions of military capability in the areas of missile defense, space, and unconventional warfare.

I will defer to each subcommittee to detail the great work they have done in this regard and commend the Chairmen and Ranking members of each for putting forth solid recommendations in each of their areas.

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